



helps children
communicate

REGISTERED CHARITY 210031

Chatting with Children

Games for 3–5 year olds to support speech,
language and communication development





Chatting with children

Surprising research tells us that in some areas of the UK, over half of the children starting school don't have the communication skills they need to learn, make friends and succeed. There are many theories as to why this is the case.

However, given the **right support**, many children learn to talk without too much effort. There's a golden age for learning to talk – this is before 5½, so skills learnt before this age bring great benefits later on. The skills learnt in these early years affect later behaviour and success in school and in life.

The 'right support' for a child learning to talk involves a close, trusted adult. This adult responds to the child's attempts to communicate and provides a stimulating learning environment for them.

Many children who struggle with talking skills, as well as children who learn to talk more easily, will benefit from these games. Learning through play really helps.

Young children need talking partners. This is you!

Familiar adults talking and listening to young children throughout the day helps them learn to talk. Doing this every day is even better!

Adults who show an interest in the child and respond to their attempts to communicate are best of all. This is how children learn about communication and how they learn to communicate themselves.

Young children need space and time to hear and understand sounds and to learn what they mean as words. Linking words to objects, actions and feelings helps young children learn the names for things so that they can start using these words themselves.

By the time children are 3, they are usually using words in increasingly complex sentences. This leads to evermore adult conversations, meaning that children can get the best out of their learning environments.



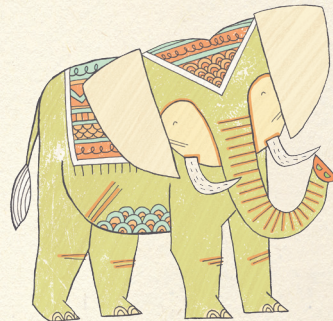
Early skills for talking

Key skill areas needed for learning to talk are as follows:

Listening and attention

Children need to learn to listen and pay attention by the time they enter school. Before they can fully understand words and sentences, they need an awareness of everyday sounds, as well as sounds in words.

Understanding the meaning of words relies on recognising voice, speech sounds and linking words with objects. The next stage is remembering more words for a sentence.



Understanding what is said

To make sense of the world, it's essential that children understand what is said to them. Following instructions helps with playing and learning, as well as getting to know what's happening at home and in early years settings. By the age of 3, most children can follow instructions involving more complex parts (colours, or position words – in, on and under). Three-year-olds can also follow instructions including three important words ("Put the brick in the big box").



Learning and using new words

As a young child's language develops, they learn and use more and more words. These words become increasingly complex, so that more information can be communicated more precisely. Learning, storing and retrieving all these words is a complicated skill.



Speaking in sentences

Putting words together in longer, more complex sentences is a big step in learning to communicate. It helps children to be more effectively understood, successfully communicate their wants and needs, and talk about past and future events.



Talking socially

Children learn their language mainly from key people in their environment, as well as the events happening around them. As children become more skilled at communication and language, they learn and understand the 'rules' that guide conversation. Successful communication includes taking turns to speak, listening and making eye contact.



Getting started



Here is a range of activities to do with young children. They build strong foundations for speech, language and communication development.

- Children need to learn their home language before they learn another language. So, use the language you naturally use at home – this is how young children learn best about words and sentences.
- Play these games wherever you are; at home, in a setting or out and about. Each game is specifically written for developing communication and language skills with 3 - 5 year olds. Games can be made easier or more challenging – younger children will probably need the easier version.
- When doing these activities together, the child will soon let you know which they enjoy best – you may find yourself repeating particular games over and over again. Repetition is one way that young children learn, so if they enjoy it, keep doing it!

- Young children have a short attention span, so may be able to play for only 10 or 15 minutes. You can always stop and start part way through an activity, or try it again later.

For parents

- Playing these games with your young child helps develop their communication skills. It also develops a closer bond between you and your child, helping you to know their interests and encouraging them to listen to you.

For practitioners

- Use the activities any time throughout the day. To help your planning, a structured six-week programme is included, with a short game for each day. Adapt this programme to meet your needs and those of the setting and your children.

Sample programme for practitioners

Each week has a theme to make it easier for you and the children to work with. This makes the best of the children's language learning and experiences, although of course you can change the theme to fit in with one in your setting.

The number of activities for each area offers different choices. Choose the most appropriate one for your group of children. Continue a theme over more than one week if it suits.

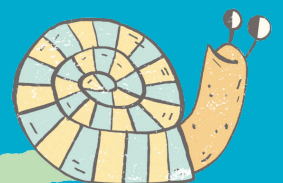
The length of each session very much depends on your knowledge of the child, and their age.

Use an activity each day, or more than one over the course of a day, and even revisit an activity.

An explanation of each game is included, and some suggested resources. We hope that you find them useful and fun to use!

Top tips for your activities

- Although all of these activities are sorted into groups, most of them will develop skills in another key area.
- Put half an hour aside – give yourself time to get ready. Play with the young child and leave time to carry on longer if the child shows you that they want to.
- Remember that developing communication and language skills should be something that's considered throughout the day. Daily routine activities like washing hands, dressing, mealtimes and going out and about are all perfect times for talking to a young child, and in turn, for them to develop their speech, language and communication skills.

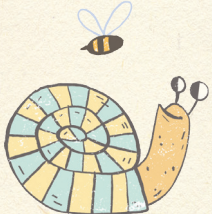


Sample programme for early years practitioners

SKILL	Week 1 FOOD	Week 2 ANIMALS	Week 3 OUTSIDE
LISTENING AND ATTENTION	- Listen to noises in the kitchen Shopping list "Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake", "Five currant buns in a baker's shop" What's that sound? 	Name the animal - Animal nursery rhymes - Sleeping lions (wake up to a sound) - Making animal noises Stop and Go games – listening for animal noises 	Stop and Go - Listen and identify environmental sounds Listen for the word 
UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SAID	- Books with a food theme - Shopping games - Making simple cakes/biscuits - Food stations game - Playdough – "Make a big cake" Toys' tea party - Doll/teddy play – following instructions - Who has? (children holding food) - Responding to a choice 	- Books with an animal theme Guessing game - Small-world play sets, e.g. farm/zoo - Commenting on play with animals - Colouring animals to instruction - Posting games – "Jack, post the dog" - Who has? (children holding different animals) 	Build a tower like mine - Water play - Sand play - Following instructions Assault courses 

SKILL	Week 4 CLOTHES	Week 5 ME AND MY FRIENDS	Week 6 BODY PARTS
LISTENING AND ATTENTION	- Dressing up games - Changing places by clothing item and colour Shopping list 	Hidden sounds Stop and Go games - Action games Listen for the word 	- Simon says - Action rhymes – "Here we go round the mulberry bush" - Dance to music and stop when music stops Stop and go 
UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SAID	- Books to talk about people's clothes - Dressing up games - Colouring clothes to instruction - Dressing dolly/teddy to instruction Tidy up time 	- Books with a people theme Who am I? - Tea party - Fishing games 	- Doll/teddy play - Find teddy Katie says... 

SKILL	Week 1 FOOD	Week 2 ANIMALS	Week 3 OUTSIDE
LEARNING AND USING NEW WORDS	- Naming food – feely bag, posting boxes - Find one the same - Toys' tea party - Shopping list - Making a collage of food items - Painting food - Food printing - Labelling actions – eating and drinking - Making requests for food items	- Naming animals – feely bag, posting boxes - Sorting out - Let's draw 	- Playing on outside play equipment - Rhyming - Things you like 
SPEAKING IN SENTENCES	- Toys' tea party - Combining name, action and object – "Sandy's eating a banana" - Combining size and food – "big apple" - Combining size, colour and food – "big red apple" 	- Painting/colouring animals, e.g. "big/little dog" - Looking at books and pictures, identify animal and action. Carry out actions - Talk about size and colours of animals, e.g. "little black dog" - Story relay 	- Playing on outside play equipment - Story relay 
TALKING SOCIALLY	- Giving out food at mealtimes - What am I doing? - Taking turns to stir cake mixture - Taking turns to make requests 	- Find your partner (children have animal masks on) - Secret action signal 	- Taking turns to play on outside play equipment - Ball rolling - Bubbles - Can you do what I do? 

SKILL	Week 4 CLOTHES	Week 5 ME AND MY FRIENDS	Week 6 BODY PARTS
LEARNING AND USING NEW WORDS	- Naming clothes – feely bag, posting boxes - Sorting out - Making a collage of clothes - Painting clothes - Object–picture matching tasks - Identifying colours of clothes 	- Playing shops - Friends' names - What's in the bag? - Think of a word 	- Labelling body parts through drawing, looking at pictures - Emphasising verbs and linking with body parts e.g. running – legs - Doll/teddy play - Rhyming 
SPEAKING IN SENTENCES	- Combining colour and clothing item – "red jumper" - Combining object and colour – "dolly trousers" - Key words 	- Tell me about it - Painting a picture of themselves and/or a friend and thinking about features - Photo album 	- Combining friend's name and action – "Jack is running" - Story puzzle - About time 
TALKING SOCIALLY	- Posting boxes (taking turns to post pictures of clothes) - Find your partner (children with the same coloured clothes on) 	- Ball rolling - Jigsaws of people - Building towers - Puppets - Peepo - How would you feel? 	- Bubbles - Copy cats 

Make the most of your time together



- **Find somewhere quiet.** Set up the activity in a quiet room. Turn off the TV and radio. Shut the door to block out any other background noises. Children have to *learn to block out background noises*, so they need a quiet environment to focus on the sounds they hear.
- **Be face-to-face.** Help young children to see your face – make sure you're at the same level as them. Sit or crouch opposite them as they play, or sit them on your lap. Being face-to-face means that the child can see you and your facial expressions. Also, you can see them and their responses and reactions to the games.
- **Don't rush.** Take plenty of time. Young children take longer than adults to process what they hear – sometimes up to 12 seconds. They need plenty of time to respond to you.
- **Be patient.** Young children can easily lose interest in what you're doing – this is perfectly normal, especially for 3-year-olds. Don't worry – just stop and try again another time.
- **Be prepared for anything.** Follow the child's lead and adapt some of the activities to fit in with what they're doing. This can help maintain attention on particular activities.
- **Ditch the dummy.** A dummy gets in the way of attempts to talk during these and other activities. Children of 3 and over don't need to use a dummy.
- **Use the language you naturally use at home.** It's important that you speak naturally to young children; this helps develop their communication and language skills.
- **Enjoy it.** This is a special time together, so have fun learning about each other.